



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
JUDICIAL BRANCH

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**Testimony of the Honorable Robert J. Devlin, Jr.  
Veterans' Affairs Committee Public Hearing  
March 3, 2015**

**Senate Bill 1015, An Act Expanding Programs For Veterans  
In The Judicial Department**

Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessy, Senator Martin, Representative Yaccarino, I am Judge Robert Devlin, and I am pleased to appear before you today on behalf of the Judicial Branch, concerning **Senate Bill 1015, An Act Expanding Programs for Veterans in the Judicial Department**. This bill would mandate the creation of a "veterans docket" in each Geographical Area (GA) court, ostensibly based on a diversionary program utilized in the New London Judicial District, and would require the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division (CSSD) to report on participation and eligibility for certain diversionary programs.

At the outset, I would like to correct a misperception about the diversionary program based in the New London Judicial District. Contrary to the language in lines 8 and 9 of the bill, it is not a veterans' docket. It is jail diversion program for veterans, operated by the Department of Mental Health and Addictions Services (DMHAS), in conjunction with the Judicial Branch and the Veterans Administration. Initially funded by a federal grant, it is intended to divert veterans who present with trauma-related symptoms from the criminal justice system and effectively address the underlying mental health condition that led to the arrest. The Judicial Branch fully supports this program because it has been effective at helping veterans.

To my understanding, the federal grant money that initially funded the initiative has since expired. However, DMHAS has successfully kept the program going in New London, and has even begun to expand the program to Norwich, Middletown and Danielson. DMHAS' ability to expand the program to three other locations in such a difficult budgetary period is noteworthy, but I recognize and appreciate the fact that the Department may not have the resources to continue its expansion to the other sixteen geographical area courts at this time. DMHAS will, however, accept referrals from those courts.

This program is far different than the proposed separate docket. In the existing program, court personnel such as bail commissioners, state's attorneys, defense attorneys, Judicial Marshals, and arresting police officers refer persons identified as veterans to a DMHAS representative in the court. The DMHAS representative then seeks to link the veteran to the needed services. In the sixteen geographical area courts without a DMHAS representative on site, Jail Diversion personnel can refer veterans to DMHAS for services.

I felt that it was important to correct the distinction between this program and a proposed separate docket because the bill calls for the Judicial Branch to create a special docket based on something that does not exist. Make no mistake, the Judicial Branch, and its judges, are committed to carefully reviewing how best to meet the needs of returning veterans. That said, we must oppose any proposal that would mandate a special docket, be it in one court, or statewide because these dockets often require additional resources and personnel and limit the Chief Court Administrator's ability to manage the Judicial Branch. It would be the Branch's preference, therefore, to make an effort to address the goals of the bill within the existing infrastructure referenced above.

I wish to emphasize that the criminal justice system in Connecticut has already become more responsive to the needs of veterans. Legislative initiatives to allow veterans to utilize the Accelerated Rehabilitation Program more than once, and allowing veterans with mental health conditions amenable to treatment to access the Supervised Diversionary Program, are having the desired effect.

As for the data requests to be found in sections 2 through 4 of the bill, the Judicial Branch is not in possession of the information being requested. CSSD's case management tracking system does not identify individuals as veterans or non-veterans. So we would simply be unable to produce this information.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, and I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.